

Sabah needs autonomy on education

By MOHD IZHAM HASHIM

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah expects the Federal Government to provide a greater say to the Sabah government on matters pertaining to education to ensure its implementation and development is managed effectively.

"To make key decisions on education, Sabah needs autonomy - discussions are being

held with federal authorities on the proposal which require certain processes, we hope this can be expedited," said Minister of Education and Innovation, Datuk Yusof Yaacob.

He underlined there are many problems facing the education sector which needs to be tackled by the Ministry, such as the lack of proper infrastructure for primary, secondary schools, including rural schools without electricity, no water and limited accessibility due to poor road access.

In his reply to questions on the areas of power Sabah needs, Yusof stressed auton-

omy would allow the ministry to focus on areas in the education sector improvement, as well as expediting the repair process for schools needing assistance instead of depending on the Federal governments.

"For instance, for school buildings damaged or destroyed by fire, this can be managed by the Sabah government rather than relying on federal assistance which could take much longer time," he told reporters after officiating the Book Launching Ceremony for Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage.

During his address, Yusof stressed of 1,296 primary and secondary schools, at least 587 schools are categorised poor while six school buildings are 'unsafe'.

For the tertiary and higher education sector, he pointed Sabah only has two universities and the number needs to be increased.

"In order to realise our vision to build knowledge-driven, skilled society in diverse fields, the Sabah government needs autonomy to implement its policies to uplift the education sector," he added.

On another issue about the plan to provide education for undocumented children, Yusof said the ministry is still conducting studies and collecting statistics on the number of children without proper documents in Sabah.

"We don't have the total figure yet - the process of identifying and collecting statistics could take a year before it can be published because Sabah is quite vast," he said, adding priority is given to children whose parents are Sabahan. He said the plan is aimed at identifying and documenting to fulfill requirements needed to register children to school.

Responding to questions on the ministry's stance on religious schools (pondok), he said proper registration of religious schools were among the main topics discussed which is needed to ensure such schools follow proper syllabus standards based on the national curriculum.

"We don't want pondok schools to operate separately without proper monitoring; proper registration would also allow pondok schools to be organised systematically - religious schools that are unregistered will be registered while

those without licenses are urged to close," said Yusof. He said religious schools (pondok) are still under the purview of the Sabah Islamic Affairs Department and the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) and the Malaysian Ministry of Education.

Meanwhile, Yusof said book launching was positive direction undertaken by UMS to expand the scope of literature on Sabah, and proposed to uplift the value of books by offering copies translated to English, Mandarin as well as other languages, which can later be further commercialised.

He also expressed hope to see more literature relating to Sabah on diverse topics for instance history and nature - not only it would increase the body of knowledge and available reference materials but also further promote Sabah through educational-tourism.

"Plans on the E-book version of the book launching can also be considered, this is the way to disseminate information to the world and we've got our own rules set for the online version in terms of purchases," he said.

Also present was UMS Vice-Chancellor, Prof Datuk Dr D Kamarudin D Mudin.



Dr Yusof (9th from left, 3rd row) together with Dr D Kamarudin (8th from right, 3rd row).